BOOK REVIEWS

The One-Act Play's the Thing

ABOUT AUTHORS

Text of Comedies and Tragedies Used in the Modern Theatre

FIFTY CONTEMPORARY ONE-ACT PLAYS. Edited by Frank Shay and Pierre Loving. Stewart and Kidd Company, Cincinnati.

Reviewed by ROBERT J. COLE.

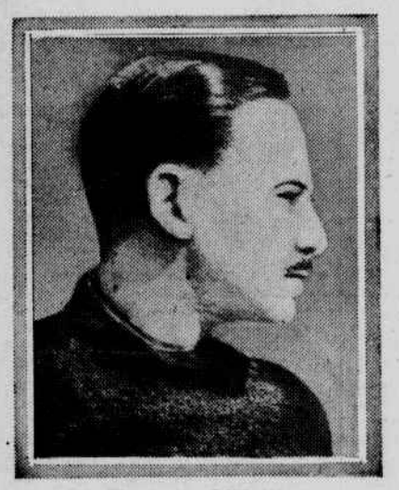
If he were here to-day, Shakespeare would very likely turn his famous lines about in some such way as this:

The stage is all the world;
And all the players merely men and women.

Older dramatists brought life into the theatre; it seems to be the task of to-day to humanize the stage itself; to bring it into relation with the other interests of the people.

The actor's status as a citizen has improved notably. Traditional separation from other contributors to the community's welfare has largely vanished. There was no class of workers that gave a more wholehearted service in the various agencies for war relief, for example. But the professional work of these creators of comic or tragic personage has come to be accepted as a necessity of civilization, a force that must be recognized as equal with college and newspaper.

Progress in America's dramatic art depends upon more than one element. The actor is the last step in presentation to the public. Behind him is the dramatist and the organization of the theatre; before him the audience. His intervention between



Eugene O'Neill

these elements is a vital one, but the time in which it is exercised is brief. If that which he transmits can be presented in another form it will tend to a more intelligent attitude on the part of the public.

The extensive circulation of plays in book form is a necessary part of the development of the theatre as a medium of art. Aside from the classics of literature which happened to be cast in dramatic form, America has only recently begun to read plays. The new interest in them is good for audience, actor and dramatist, since it tends to the habit of discrimination, to the forming of standards of taste.

Cyril Maude, the English actor, once told me he thought all public school children should be taught writing in dramatic—or at least dialogue—form. This would not make dramatists of us all—we are that anyway—but it would make more intelligent playgoers, besides being excellent training in the art of conversational expression. And now and then it might help to start on the right trail the child with genuine dramatic gift.

Well, I think there is a good deal to be said in favor of the idea. This book—or rather library—so helpfully put together by Shay and Loving, would not do for primary classes, but college classes in playwriting might well study it. The fifty selections were drawn from a thousand plays considered. In his introduction Loving has this to say of the reasons for including a majority of native compositions:

"The reader will observe that plays by American authors predominate over those of any other single country, and the reason for this is fairly obvious. American plays, besides being most readily available to the anthologist, are beginning to reflect the renascence that is gradually taking place in the American theatre. There is growing up in this country a younger generation of dramatists, which is achieving its most notable work outside the beaten path of popular recognition, in small dramatic juntas and in the little theatres. In the main the form they employ as being most suitable to their needs is that offered by the concise scaffold of the one-act play. These efforts, we hold deserve a wider audience."

These are not presented as something to be considered apart from the institution from which they were written. They were made to be acted. In reading them one should create his own imaginary accessories. The character of these is suggested in the introduction:

"Imagine a playhouse, perfectly equipped, plastic and infinitely adaptable. Invite Arthur Hopkins, John Williams, Winthrop Ames, Sam Hume and George Cram Cook to manage it. Let them run riot on the stage. Clear the wings and the front of the house of all routineers. Fill the seats at each performance with the usual gallery haunters of the New York theatres. Do not overlook the hosts of experimental playhouse directors—unleash them in the backyard area with a *kammerspielhaus* to toy with at pleasure. Let the personnel of the play reading committee consist of such men as Ludwig Lewisohn, Barrett H. Clark, George Jean Nathan and Francis Hackett. The result will take care of itself. This, in brief, is the theatrical menage for which, in the main, the plays included in this volume were written."

Although America is predominant, a wide view has been taken, with these countries represented: Austria, Schnitzler's "Literature"; Belgium, Maeterlinck's "Intruder"; Bolivia, Federico More's "Interlude"; France, Ancey's "M. Lambiin," and the "Francoise's Luck" of Porto-Riche.

Germany has one more than France, the third being a "comedy" by Wedekind, which ends in a suicide! Richard Strauss's librettist, the poet Hugo von Hofmansthal, is represented by a little play in verse, well translated by Harriet Betty Boas. Not the least excellence of this volume, by the way, is the general excellence of its translations. Drama aside, it is worth reading if only for the comparative hints of international psychology. Among the translated pieces are plays from Holland, Hungary, Italy, Russia, Spain, Sweden and two from that intensely human language of all lands and no land, Yiddish.

Of the thirty plays originally written in English, Great Britain has six. One of these, "The Pierrot of the Minute," by Ernest Dowson, is in verse. The poets have their rightful place in the volume, as they have made their place in the drama's history. It happens rather curiously that Pierrot appears also in the American section in the verse of Edna St. Vincent Millay.

There is an astonishing variety in the character of these plays. The dramatist, like the singer of lyric or ballad, being less preoccupied with structure, is able to indulge his fancy with a gayer inconsequence. On the other hand, if the purpose be serious, into the brief space is forced a full charge of tragedy. Susan Glaspell's "Trifles" is as fine an example of concentration in its own way as Barrie's "Twelve Pound Look"—a masterpiece to which the editors may have referred sadly in their regret over some gaps caused by copyright restrictions.

The characteristic of the American group is its youthful tone—whether the key be that of comedy or of tragedy. It is the drama of experiment, of intellectual adventure, suggesting even the nature of new organizations like Stuart Walker's Portmanteau Theatre.

It would be easier to write a page than a column about this crowded book. There is art in it and ethnology and psychology and many a long evening's good reading. In thousands of dramatic clubs it should help to answer the question of repertoire.

Four of the dozens of authors whose concentrated brilliance has put the one-act play on the dramatic map. From left to right they are Leonid Andreyev, the Russian; Stuart Walker and Susan Glaspell, who represent the large group of Americans; and Jacinto Benevente of Spain.

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New York Preserves Historic Sites

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AMERICAN SCENIC AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION SOCIETY, 1920. Legislative Document, No. 117. J. B. Lyon Company, Albany.

TO turn the pages of the twenty-fifth annual report of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society for the year 1920 is to be reminded how little we know, or how much we forget, of the patient faithful work done by this organization to preserve our country's natural scenic beauties and to maintain our historic shrines. Although primarily a New York State institution, the scope of its work now appears to include the whole world, for in its text the reader will find described the progress of the work of preserving our national parks and national forests; the conservation of animal life; a page devoted to the newsprint situation; ten pages to statistics of the world war; American soldiers' graves and French soldiers' graves in America; soldiers' memorials in the United States and Canada; notes of historical buildings and restorations in Great Britain, France, Belgium, Switzerland; scenic preservation movements in Switzerland, China, Germany, Italy and Japan. And this world-embracing mass of information is particularly well arranged and indexed.

Naturally our interest must be chiefly concerned with local and State movements described here. These include the Stony Point battlefield, Letchwork Park, Phillipse Manor Hall, the John Boyd Thacher Park, Battle Island Park, the New York city parks, the State Forest Preserve and the latest activity of the general movement for the preservation of distinctive scenic features, as historic monuments and the plan to acquire Mount Marcy in the Adirondacks as a memorial of the part which the State of New York took in winning the world war.

This proposal was originated by the Victory Mountain Park Association, formed under the auspices of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks in 1919. Mount Marcy is the State's highest mountain and for that reason as well as for its geologic and historic interest the mountain and the surrounding territory are desired as a Victory Memorial. The annual report of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society recalls the fact that the late Theodore Roosevelt was enjoying an outing at the base of the mountain in 1901 when President McKinley was shot. Roosevelt had started to climb the mountain and had reached its summit when he received word that President McKinley's condition was such as to demand his presence in Buffalo.

While Roosevelt was on the road from Mount Marcy to the nearest railroad station, at North Creek, President McKinley died and Roosevelt automatically became President at 2 A. M. on September 14. To commemorate this event the late Harry V. Radford erected a monument by the roadside between the lower Tahawus Clubhouse and Minerva bearing the following inscription:

NEAR THIS POINT,
WHILE DRIVING HASTILY FROM TAHAWUS CLUB TO NORTH CREEK AT 2:15
A. M., SEPTEMBER 14, 1901,
THEODORE ROOSEVELT
BECAME PRESIDENT
OF THE UNITED STATES,
AS WILLIAM McKINLEY EXPIRED
IN BUFFALO.
RELAY DRIVERS:
DAVID HUNTER, TAHAWUS CLUB
ORREN KELLOGG, TAHAWUS TO
ALDEN LAIR
MICHAEL CRONIN, ALDEN LAIR TO
NORTH CREEK.
ERECTED 1908
AND PRESENTED TO THE TOWN OF
NEWCOMBE
BY H. V. RADFORD.

Among the New York city parks and historical buildings described and pictured in the report are Battery Park and its suggested peace memorial 160 stories high; Central Park and its proposed stadium; our latest memorial and pleasure ground, Hero Park on Staten Island; the modified plan for the New York County Courthouse; the completion of the new Assay Office; the demolition of Stanford White's distinguished Madison Square Presbyterian Church; the Town Meeting Hall, and a description of Walt Whitman landmarks in the suburbs of the city.

The presentation of the "freedom of the city of New York" to distinguished foreign visitors in 1919 has served as the occasion for the indefatigable secretary of the association making this report, Dr. Edward Hagaman Hall, to prepare and include in the book a list of recipients of this honor from 1702 to 1919, with notations of the costs of some of the gold boxes presented to distinguished "freemen" of the city. One of the curious features disclosed by Dr. Hall's researches in this particular field is that there is no official record of "any formal action authorizing the conferring the freedom of the city on Cardinal Mercier, King Albert and the Prince of Wales in 1919, although, as a matter of fact, the Mayor did publicly confer the municipal honor on those distinguished visitors."

There is also no record of the Mayor's action in the case of Eamonn De Valera, "President of the Irish Republic," although the Board of Aldermen voted him the compliment of the freedom of the city. The report suggests that a form of procedure be authorized for the bestowal of this gift, to perfect the future records of the city.

Talk With the Painter-Father of a Poet

By MARY GRAHAM BONNER.

FOR fourteen years John Butler Yeats, the well known Irish writer and portrait painter, has lived in the same little "pension" in the upper Twenties on the West Side of New York. At his table gather nightly many of New York's literary people, artists, sculptors, critics, theatrical folk, who go to talk to Mr. Yeats, and who always return. For those who have thought that conversation was a lost art in this age change that opinion after sitting by this corner table at the head of which is John Butler Yeats. He is always kindly in his criticisms and in his talk, though incisive and keen and ever on the alert, with a geniality which is contagious and a smile which lights up his whole face, with a nimble wit and the gracious gift of being able to find the heart of any subject.

His interest in "what the fashionable man should wear" is obviously lacking. It is not his height which is commanding nor his gray beard—which, if you stop to think about his appearance, you remember that he has—but it is the brightness of his eyes, the illumination of his smile, the dignity and charm inherent in the whole man, that win the listener.

Always other Irish poets, artists, gather about him when they come to New York, to hear what he has to say, to tell him of their latest efforts and to bring him personal accounts of his two famous sons. For John Butler Yeats, in addition to being himself, is the father of the Irish poet and playwright, leader of the Irish literary movement, William Butler Yeats, and of the artist, John Butler Yeats, who is more often referred to as "Jack."

He sat in his room when I interviewed him, surrounded by books and magazines, portraits, sketches, pencils, pipes. And he sketched as he talked.

"My father intended me to be a barrister," he said. "But you see what kind of a barrister I became! I was admitted to the bar," he continued, his eyes twinkling at the thought of such incongruity, "and remained a barrister for just one year. I remember that another young barrister had a small group of us in his rooms one evening—we were all good friends. Every one of those who were there that evening became a very successful, very important man. Several of them were afterward brilliant judges. They all had their carriages, the fruits of their prosperity."

He paused for a moment and looked about his room at the luxuries of the mind—books, pictures. "All the barristers in that group," he continued, "with one exception, died many years ago. The last one died three years ago. And I am still alive. If I had been a successful barrister I am quite sure I should not be alive now."

Although Mr. Yeats tells you his years are many, that he has gone far past the age that so many consider old, there is a buoyancy, a gayety, a vigor about him that makes you discredit vital statistics and totally abandon age from your vocabulary.

"It is the wish to live that has done it," he went on. "Had I remained a barrister I should not have had that wish. I might have become very rich, very prosperous, but I might not have had the joy in living that I have now."

When I asked him if he ever thought of going back to Ireland, he glanced about the room, and then cried:

"Oh! Why will you ask such a question? What in the devil could I do with all these things—the books and everything here—if I left?"

The whimsical despair was characteristic. But one could not help wondering if the city and country in which he is a guest had not gained a hold upon him.

"What do you think of American poetry?" I asked.

"I didn't like it at all at first," he replied. "It was too much like the scenery. I didn't like the scenery either at first—not until I got to know it, not until I came closer to its mountains and its hills. At first it seemed too big, too expansive, too huge to enjoy and it was the same with the poetry. But now I know why Americans love their scenery. It was so different to me at first from the scenery I knew and loved—I lacked the intimacy. But once you understand it you realize it is very beautiful."

He was frank enough, however, to analyze our national characteristics without flattery.

"The great fault with your literature, with your people," he went on, "is that you're entirely too fond of argument." He put down his pencil and drew back from his drawing board then. "Argument," he explained, "isn't conversation. It has all the horrors of a debating society without the saving grace of debate—namely, the rules. In argument there is debate but no rules. I belonged for twenty years to a conversation club in London. We never had one argument in all that time. If one of our number had discovered something new, had become interested in anything, we immediately leaned forward to hear what he had to say, to help him in his discovery, to bring forth his opinions. You know it was Socrates who said that he did not argue but that he helped a friend to deliver his thoughts, which was a talent he had inherited from his mother, who had been a midwife. Rather good, eh?

"Here you seem to think that it is a battle of wits when you all get together and argue. There's too much theory about it. There is not enough self-expression to it—and that is the whole trouble.

"The Queen, you know, used to say she much preferred Beaconsfield to Gladstone, for in their interviews Beaconsfield seemed to be talking to her, whereas Gladstone talked to her as though he were addressing the House of Commons. His talk was too collective, too all embracing. There was not enough self in it.

"I think the English write better because their education is so much more thorough. They're taught to concentrate. Your writers here aren't satisfied with developing one idea. They want to go around ch sing at least twenty-four. In the education in England the ground work is so complete, they do not take so many subjects, they don't get a smattering of many things. But they learn what they learn very thoroughly and they learn how to concentrate and finish one thing. That makes them start off with a training in literary good breeding. I think here you find a great many intellectually underbred people.

"From the Puritans you derived a certain sternness and hardness, a sense of responsibility and a sense of honor, the ideals of fraternity and liberty and equality, to which you owe a great deal. There's a sound background. Those qualities become spiritual when the first repression has been lifted. I'd say you were a very spiritual race. Almost too spiritual. You're all too intent on running about for as much spirituality as you can absorb.

"The Puritans were samples of controlled animalism. You know, people think animalism a very horrible thing. It's not. It's a very fine thing. What is love of wife, love of home, love of children but animalism? We go back to the beasts and there we find all those qualities. But animalism controlled is what we find in those old Puritans. They owned themselves.

"Now, your people don't own themselves to begin with," he said, with a whimsical gleam of amusement. "They don't even own their homes. They don't even own their apartments. They don't even own their furniture. They live in apartments and plan what their next apartments will be like and what their next move will be.

"They go around to lecture courses and dash here and there for ideas and theories and opinions. They do not care to stop and look into themselves.

"Your critics here are really constructive critics. There are three kinds of criticism—destructive criticism, which my people have; constructive criticism, which you have here in America, and exacting criticism, such as they have in England.

"Take painting or sketching, for example." He pointed to his drawing board. "An Irish critic would stand back of my chair and look over my shoulder at the picture and crush me with his criticism. He would have an enormously good time at my expense.

"An English critic would love the picture he was about to criticise. He would examine it carefully. He would regard it in that completely concentrated, thorough fashion of his. But he would be very exacting. He would pick out the little flaws, going into the most minute details, and tell me in what way they could be improved. It is so with their magazine writers, their writers for the quarterlies in particular. They make complete studies of their subjects. They go to infinite pains to have every detail right.

"Now the American critic would stand back of my chair and regard my picture. In several illuminating sentences he would seize upon the whole trouble and would make me see what he meant at once. I would derive from his criticism a knowledge of what big stroke here was needed, what change there. He would see it as a whole and criticise it constructively. The same is true of your literary critics. They know the criticism that is constructive, and so they know how to make your writers successful."

"Do you think," I questioned, with dread in my heart, "that our writers are too eager for financial success? Do you think because they live in a country which is so prosperous and where so much money abounds that they too get the spirit of it?" But his answer reassured me.

"No, I don't think they care about being commercially successful any more than our writers do. But I think they care more about being 'Somebodies.' With us, with our poets and our writers, it is enough if the small group of literary intellectuals think well of our work. We want to please those whose opinions are worth while. If we have done good work in their opinion we are satisfied. Here I think you are all too anxious to be successful—not financially—but with the mob. You want a great many people to regard you as famous, to regard you as a Somebody, whereas we only care for that very small group who know and understand."

A father with such clear and decided views on the creation of literature must have had some effect, I thought, on his son's work—though it isn't safe to jump to conclusions in these matters. At any rate, I asked him about his relations with his boys. This was the reply:

"My son Willie says I was very strict. I don't think so at all. He says I made him study, was constantly hurling a book at his head. Don't take that literally," he protested. "A woman who had heard Willie make the remark told me later she had not wanted to meet me, for she disliked any man who would throw a book at his son! But you see it was just what Willie needed. If he had had no intellectual training he would always have dreamed his poetry away. He would have been different. He would never have produced his dreams! But there was never any corporal punishment in our home.

"Take what I said about being successful. Willie doesn't care about money or about fame. He strives only to do good work in the eyes of those whose opinions count. It is the same with Jack, too."

I could understand how a reporter of the daily *Stylus* of Rome, Italy, must have felt in the course of a talk with the mother of the Gracchi. As he talked to me of "Willie" and of "Jack" I thought how Cornelia must have enjoyed it when in answer to a question on how her famous "jewels" had been polished she explained her method of correcting tendencies to childish rascality on the part of little Tiberius or Caius. But Mr. Yeats wasn't done with his analysis. Even a father's pride could not turn him from his purpose to tell the whole truth about us.

"Often American women—Easterners especially—feel too much on the defensive. They feel they are talking to an enemy when they are talking to an English woman or an Irish woman. They fear they will not appear well, and so they don't—because they aren't natural. They won't be themselves!

"Personality is the most important quality in life and in art and in literature. Temperament is all very well, but it must not stop at that point. Temperament alone is very trying and never gets anywhere. But temperament controlled is what we should strive for! That makes personality.

"But all of these questions you've asked me on national questions, on American literature versus English literature, are in the long run not so much national questions as questions that have become worldwide. Collective development takes up so much of our attention that we do not give enough to the individual—anywhere. That makes it all very fine for the progress of mankind, the general good of the world—very good, indeed. But for literature it is fatal. And perhaps it is emphasized more here than abroad. Your people, your writers tell of everything that is going on around them when what we want to hear about, what we want to know is what they're thinking and feeling themselves.

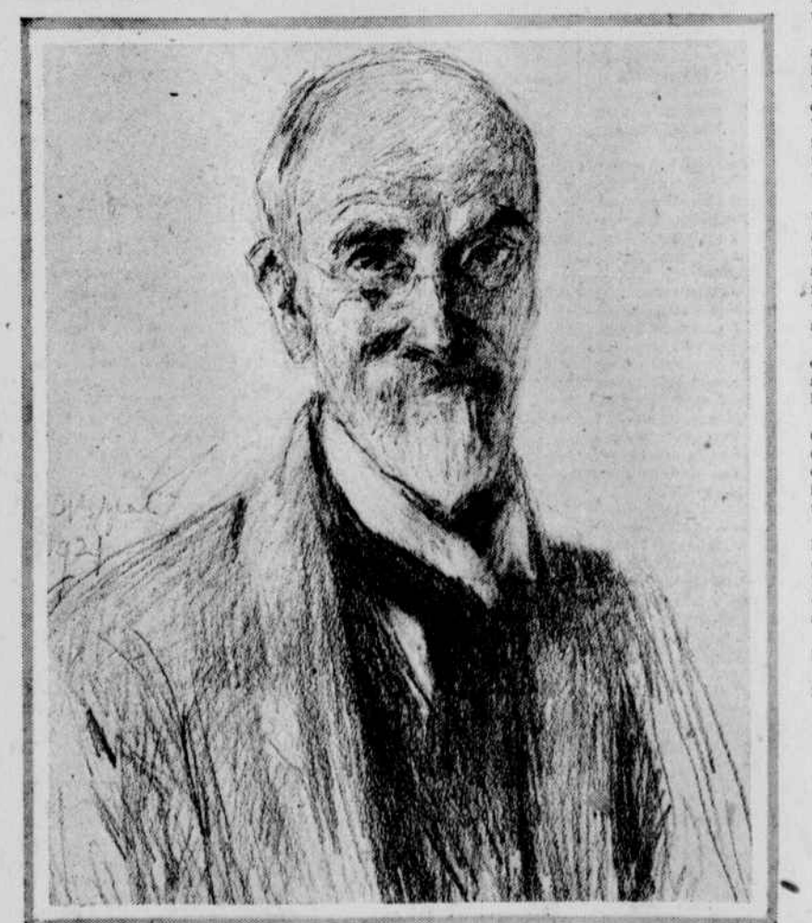
"If we don't hear that we don't get the finer things in writing. We get a mere emotionalism which is different from feeling. Feeling is so much deeper. It comes from within, whereas emotionalism comes from without. You cannot get poignant suffering, individual feeling, deep beauty and art unless we become less and less a collective people and more and more individuals. That is what literature needs—individualism.

"You know, Sir Philip Sidney said, 'Look in thy heart and write!' Don't go around all day searching for what ideas you may pick up here and there. Look into your own heart and write what you feel. Then you get literature! Temperament controlled—that is the great secret."

He looked at me with that genial and engaging manner of his and added:

"I'm sure I've told you nothing of what you came for. But I know that temperament plus self-control gives the personality that makes you realize your dreams. I've seen it demonstrated in our own family—in Willie and in Jack."

I left him then, surrounded by his books, his portraits and his sketches and his pipes. And I thought of his own work, his inimitable charm, his own *personality*, that not only showed itself in the brightness of his sympathetic, twinkling, gay, keen eyes but in the gift he had bestowed on his two sons.



John Butler Yeats. From a sketch by himself.

"I Cannot Hold Him in My Heart"

By SAMUEL HOFFENSTEIN.

I cannot hold Him in my heart;
I share my burden with the night;
I trust Him to the knowing stars,
The evening wind, the morning light;
I lay Him down upon the dawn;
I cradle Him upon the sea;
I give Him to the mountain peaks
That hold Him high and holily.

A rose leaf is His perfect bed;
He finds a home within a tree;
A little child, whose heart is new
And vast, contains Him easily;
A dewdrop is His universe;
Bees hail Him in their honey mart.
I give Him to your spacious love—
I cannot hold Him in my heart.